

Prominent among the names of those who have honored Fulton County at the Bar, on the judicial bench, and in the legislative halls of the nation, stands that of John Wells. He was a native of Johnstown, N.Y. and was born July 1, 1817. His father was Nathan P. Wells, one of the early settlers in this locality. He obtained an academic education in his native village, and was graduated from Union College in 1835. In pursuance of his determination to enter the legal profession, he entered the office of the eminent jurist, Daniel Cady, and was admitted to the bar in 1839. He began his practice in the village of Palmira, N.Y., but soon returned to Johnstown, opened an office and continued in practice by himself until 1843-'44, when he formed a co-partnership with Donald McMartin; this partnership continued only a year or two. Mr. Wells had now obtained a position at the bar which was highly creditable for one of his years. Under the Constitution of 1846 he was elected County Judge for the term beginning July 1, 1847 and ending Dec. 31, 1851. While County Judge he developed those qualities which made him conspicuous as a profound lawyer and an upright and incorruptible judge, whom neither fear or favor could swerve from that righteousness which should ever characterize those who are called to the responsible positions which he filled with much credit to himself, and such general approval of all, who had occasion to know his peculiar qualities of mind and heart.

Before the expiration of his term as Judge he received the nomination for Congress, without seeking on his part, or even a desire for it, and was elected in the Fall of 1851. He resigned the office of Judge in November 1852, to take his seat in the House of Representatives in the December following. During his congressional term he made several speeches which attracted very general attention. His speech on non-intervention was a masterly and exhaustive effort, in which he took strong grounds in favor of the United States embracing every opportunity to promulgate Republican views to the world. It is a searching criticism of what is known as the "Monroe Doctrine".

He was present in Washington at the reception of the Hungarian patriot, Kossuth, for whom and Kossuth's struggling people Wells expressed great sympathy. At the close of his first term in Congress Mr. Wells declined to be a candidate for re-election as public life in the National Capital and the general turmoil of legislation and politics were not congenial with his more quiet tastes and habits. From that time onward, though an unswerving Republican, and taking great interest in the public affairs of the State and Nation, he steadily refused to be a candidate for any office. For sometime after his return from Congress, he gave much of his attention to literary labor and published several of his work, which were circulated among his friends. In this was exhibited a high order of literary ability, which might have given him an honorable standing in the great world of letters but for his habitual dislike of notoriety.

In 1857 Judge Wells entered into partnership with James M. Dudley in the practice of law. This firm subsequently commanded a very extensive practice, and continued in existence just twenty years. After years of active practice, younger men were admitted to the firm to assist in the increasing business. Judge Wells died on the 30th of May 1877.



A meeting of the bar was held on June 12th to take action on the death of Judge Wells. A series of memorial resolutions was adopted and leading lawyers and judges spoke of the life and character of their associate. Mr. Dudley presided at the meeting and paid a high and feeling tribute to the noble qualities and eminent attainments of his former partner. And at the opening of the Court, June 13, the resolutions adopted by the bar were presented and accepted by the Court. Several prominent members who were present spoke in eulogy of their deceased associate and friend. The remarks of Hon. John Stewart\* on that occasion were biographical in character and in their course he said,—"When I say that Judge Wells was a friend of mankind I speak from a knowledge based upon an intimate acquaintance with him for nearly thirty years. He was an excellent lawyer and an independent upright and impartial judge. He was not only an able lawyer, but a statesman as well. The speech delivered by him in Congress furnished unmistakable evidence of his rare capacity for statesmanship. Some of us who have argued cases before him on the bench; others of us have met him at the bar in many hard-fought and closely contested legal controversies, and all of us have met him more or less frequently at the social circle, and in the walks of private life, and, speaking for myself alone I am free to say that I never knew a man who possessed a more evenly balanced mind and temperament than he possessed; not is it too much to say that in his death our profession has lost one of its brightest ornaments and the community one of its most robust and worthy citizens. Judge Wells was an honest man; he was also a sincere, earnest and true man, sincere in his counsel to every one who sought it and earnest and true to his convictions of right and duty. He was also a good man,--good in the broadest and most catholic acceptance of that term".

Judge Wells was twice married,--first on Sept. 5, 1843, to Margaret Stewart and second, on Jan. 12, 1869 to Mrs. Catherine D. Hagaman, who survives him.

NOTES:- In 1865 when the F.J. & G. R.R. was projected Judge Wells was made treasurer of the movement.

Judge Wells never solicited professional engagements. His love of literature was a controlling power in his life. He died suddenly while in the fullness of his powers.

Wells Family:- John Wells was the son of Nathan Perkins Wells<sup>6</sup> and Sarah Aikin.

Children of John Wells by Margaret Stewart,--

1. Nathan J. d. aet 24-
2. Catherine,--mar Philetus Pierson Argersinger
3. (Unmarried)- SARAH -
4. John,--d young-
5. Elisabeth,--d young-
6. Walter S,--mar. Caroline Quackenbush
7. Anna,--mar Dr. J. H. Glas, Utica, N.Y.
8. John,--d infant

No children by second marriage.

© Man That Name  
in Union Class  
1865

abstracted from  
Frothingham's  
History of True Love

in Union 1864?



Congressional Bio-  
graphical Directory

p. 1682.

✓ WELLS, John, a Representative from New York; born in Johnstown, Fulton County, N. Y., on July 1, 1817; attended Johnstown Academy, and was graduated from Union College, Schenectady, N. Y., in 1835; studied law, was admitted to the bar in 1839, and commenced practice in Palmyra, N. Y.; shortly thereafter returned to Johnstown, N. Y., and continued the practice of law; elected judge of Fulton County, and served from June, 1847, until his resignation in December, 1851, having been elected to Congress; elected as a Whig to the Thirty-second Congress (March 4, 1851-March 3, 1853); declined to be a candidate for reelection in 1852 to the Thirty-third Congress; resumed the practice of law and also engaged in literary pursuits; died in Johnstown, Fulton County, N. Y., May 30, 1877; interment in Johnstown Cemetery.

WELLS, Daniel, Jr., a Representative from Wisconsin;

XXIV

Wells, John. 1835 7/15/1835.

"...of Johnstown...I have always thought him to be a clever, amiable little fellow till of late it was intimated that he was a mischievous dissembling rogue...yet, if they possess moral principle enough they may pass through the enchanting scenes of vice...his talents are quite respectable and his scholarship good." Pearson Diaries V.2, pp.151-152. ALSO V.4, p.750.



Copy  
Wm. L.  
Malden

J.R.B.

John D. Wells \* Union College H Class of 1835

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No children by second marriage.

Union, 1847.

*Transcribed from  
Frothingham's  
Fulton Co -*



John Wells

A.B. 1835



John Wells

1835  
P.B.